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## Ventura County Star: Conejo Valley

New plan for 101 may force fewer relocations

SCAG official discusses effects at public forum

By Brad Smith, bsmith@VenturaCountyStar.com November 20, 2003

When Robert and Elizabeth Sperry's home on Ostronic Drive in Woodland Hills was new, Highway 101 was six lanes of mostly empty concrete, a long suburban block away from their quiet, tree-lined equestrian neighborhood.

"In 1963, you couldn't even hear the freeway, even in the back yard," Elizabeth Sperry said, talking about the ranch house on a half-acre lot where she raised three children. "Now there's no place in the house you can't hear it."

Today, Elizabeth, 69, a retired nurse, and Robert, 76, an attorney, live in the last house on Ostronic before the highway. A two-year project to improve the Valley Circle-Highway 101 interchange in the 1990s leveled everything between their house and the freeway.

"It's been like the (1994) earthquake, for years," Robert Sperry said. "There used to be two rows of houses between us and the freeway; now we're right next to it."

The Sperrys' experience is likely to be repeated by homeowners in Los Angeles and Ventura counties over the next three decades; the **Southern California Association of Governments**, or SCAG, has proposed widening the freeway to seven lanes in each direction, including at least two on an "upper deck," from downtown Los Angeles into Ventura County to accommodate future traffic.

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1/15/2004

The estimated \$900 million plan, which could include toll lanes, comes just six months after a similar plan collapsed amid opposition from residents along the route.

SCAG officials say they understand the opponents' concerns, which crystallized after Metropolitan Transportation Authority planners estimated the original project would require the destruction of hundreds of homes and businesses in Los Angeles neighborhoods stretching from Woodland Hills to Sherman Oaks.

"We think the right-of-way takings for this proposal will be minimal," said Hasan Ikrata, a SCAG planner, who spoke at a community forum on the plan Tuesday night in Calabasas.

"I expect there will be some second deck, whether for trains or lanes; it will happen."

Details of the design in Ventura County are thin, but SCAG officials said it would require the condemnation of at least 30 to 40 homes in the Conejo Valley.

"That's at most; it's not going to be serious," Ikrata said.

The project would include widening the existing freeway to five lanes in each direction in those segments, mostly in the city of Los Angeles, where they are currently only four lanes wide. In addition, it would add two "high occupancy vehicle," or bus/train lanes, in each direction as well.

Overall, the freeway would go from the current eight to 10 lanes of total capacity to 14 lanes, with four of those reserved for the HOV lanes. That space, which would likely be elevated, could eventually include commuter rail lines.

The Highway 101 plan is part of a document called the Regional Transportation Plan, approved earlier this year by SCAG's Transportation Committee.

The panel, which includes representatives from Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties, expects to release a draft environmental impact report associated with the RTP in December. Both would go to the full board for consideration in April.

Along with the Highway 101 proposal, other local projects would include improvements on Highway 33 between Ventura and Ojai, known as the Casitas Bypass, and on Vineyard Avenue between Highway 101 and Los Angeles Avenue.

For the Sperrys, who also attended the Calabasas meeting, it all sounds familiar.

"It's going to happen," Robert Sperry said. "I think people in Ventura County should organize to try and delay it, but it's going to happen -- and if you live in the way, get prepared to move."

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